

Steve Angel

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#63, 64 & 65 - STEVE

HOW DID THE ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE PROGRAM BEGIN....

Well it started in Greenhaven Prison in New York which is a maximum security prison where they have the electric chair. And it was a group of inmates who called themselves the think tank concept who were trying to help younger men who were headed in the same direction. They had come to find better ways of dealing with violence in their lives. And ah they weren't having that much success in getting their ideas across. I think they were using largely the scared straight kind of approach. You know you continue with what you've been doing and you're going to end up where we are and this is what prison is like and so forth, which they didn't find a very motivational approach to actually changing behaviour. And ah because we had a Quaker worship group there in the prison they knew that during the Vietnam war years they'd heard that we had trained thousands of marshalls to go into demonstrations and help keep them non-violent. So they said could you come and teach us something about how to teach non-violence. And so the first workshop was born at Greenhaven at the request of inmates. And ah it was a very successful event. I mean they greatly appreciated what was given to them. The team for that was drawn from a rather wide area - as far south as Atlanta and out to the mid-west - individuals who had worked with the Quakers and with Martin Luther King in earlier years. And my sole connection with workshop was that we - my wife and I served as host to Bernard Lafayette who was one of Martin Luther King's right hand people. And so he stayed at home and we had brief periods to visit with him during the three days the workshop took place. And I count that as a real privilege. Because he had a great deal to share about non-violence having lived through a great deal himself. My contacts with the program beyond that was for first workshop were rather sparse until they formed the corporation. I knew what was going

on. I had - I heard some of the activities and wondered how they ever made any sense in prison and I didn't see how I could possibly be a part of such a process. But when the - it was necessary to form a corporation in 1979 I was asked to be one of the incorporators by Lawrence Apsey the founder and to serve on the board of directors which I was glad to do for Larry and also out of interest in the project. And that was just the beginning. I didn't know how involved I would become but -

CAN I STOP YOU THERE? DID YOU IMMEDIATELY GET INVOLVED? WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST WORKSHOP LIKE AS A PARTICIPANT?

My first workshop was in the community and it was in Albany. And I really went out of a sense of obligation, not because I felt I needed it. But those who were very active in the program said, Steve, you know, you're on the board of directors, you ought to know what we're doing, and I couldn't really disagree with that. But I certainly didn't consider myself a violent person or in need of this kind of training. So I took the workshop and I just found out things about Steve Angel I didn't know before that there's violence in me too. And I found out although here I'm a social worker, I'd spent my life in this profession that I wasn't really as in touch with my own feelings as I should be and in order to conduct my personal relationships in a better way -

IN WHICH WAY? CAN YOU GIVE ME SOMETHING CONCRETE?

My wife, for example, that sometimes without really being aware of it, I was putting her down. And this was a form of violence. And that I wasn't using 'I' messages often. I was using 'you' messages and just these simple little things but they can make a whole lot of difference in a relationship and -

WHY DON'T WE STOP JUST FOR A SECOND.

MAYBE AT THIS POINT IT WOULD BE GOOD TO GET INTO SOMETHING THAT'S EXTREMELY IMPORTANT IN THE WORKSHOP AND THAT IS UNDERSTANDING WHAT VIOLENCE IS IN A WIDER CONTEXT AND ALSO I'D LIKE STEVE ANGEL FROM HIS WISEST

PART OF HIMSELF TO ANSWER THE QUESTION, WHAT ARE THE ... OF VIOLENCE.

Well certainly we find in the workshops that most of the individuals come in with a very narrow view of what violence is. And I think it principally is physical. But very rapidly they seem to grasp the fact that it's a lot more than that and that you don't have to touch someone and yet you can still be very violent with that person. And this is a real eye opener to them and certainly forms the basis for I think everything else we do in the workshop because they see relevance to exercises which otherwise they wouldn't see if they continued with that narrow view. I guess I'd have to say for me the roots of violence are very much centred in self and in wanting things for self rather than thinking of others, rejecting ah what others may have to offer which either may be offered in a caring way or perhaps an uncaring way but again rejecting it out of self ah views. And that the only way we can move from that is to develop an attitude of really caring for others. And this sort of brings this you might say in a full circle because I don't think we can really care for others unless we care for ourselves so that if we can really develop positive caring attitudes towards ourselves that opens us up to developing positive and caring attitudes towards others. And I think when you get those two ingredients in place you're ready to begin to develop a more non-violent life style. Prior to that you're pretty much centred not on loving self but pleasing self, often rather negative ways.

ONE OF THE THINGS THAT HAS BECOME APPARENT TO ME IS THAT - I WOULD LIKE TO HEAR YOUR REACTION TO IT - IS THAT PEOPLE IN PRISON FOR WHATEVER REASON STRIKE ME AS BEING ABLE TO COME A LONG WAY, CAPABLE OF - MAYBE CAPABLE OF MORE GROWTH IN A SHORTER PERIOD OF TIME THAN PEOPLE OUTSIDE IN THE COMMUNITY.

What I've experienced is that when I do community workshops people get very intellectual. And they have many times developed very good defences against revealing themselves and so they go into intellectualizing everything. Also there are

variations on this but certainly don't have the same degree of personal trauma usually that individuals in the outside have been through as you do sort of as a group, as a whole when you see guys on the inside. Also they're in an environment which is an uncaring environment. And the caring attitude of the workshop just hits them like a lightning bolt. What goes here? Why is there so much caring? Why, why do these people come in and spend three days with us and they don't get paid anything? So I think there's a tremendous impact that there are people who care who will spend time, will share something and in a non-judgemental way. We never ask anyone what their crime is. We aren't interested in defining them by that aspect of their lives. We want to look for the positive aspects of their character and their being. And so the whole positivity element of the workshop is just really something completely new to them and this is different from what you encounter on the outside. And I'm sure, you know, when you took the workshop you heard men say, it doesn't seem like I'm in prison when I'm here. So it is sort of an oasis away from the prison environment. And although it's 12 hours, 3 days and therefore I think quite taxing on the individual, often they really don't want to leave. They don't want it to end.

YOU SEE SO MANY CHANGES AND SO MANY - YOU SEE THE DEFENCES DROP. YOU SEE A FLOWERING. DOES IT LAST AFTERWARDS?

Well of course that varies from individual to individual. I don't think you can expect to make life changes in three days. What you can expect and I have seen this happen over and over again is you get the person to redefine themselves or start redefining themselves. And as soon as they start doing that, they then begin to think of different ways of living their lives. And in the prisons there are some opportunities, some more in some settings than in others for them to begin to select positive things to do rather than negative things because much of prison life is centred around doing negative things. Even if it's just talking in the yard they're talking about their crimes, they're talking about what they'll do when they get out, they're talking about all the negativity that's been in their lives. But I have heard from

numerous men who've become involved in AVP that they then begin to try and turn away from this and begin to think about positive things they could be doing and to walk away from the negative discussions and try to get into positive discussions. Because in these workshops often they find themselves talking about things they never even conceived of talking about before and once they start the process and they see these buddies on the outside they can sort of continue these kinds of conversations. And that is life changing.

A LOT OF PEOPLE DO GO ON.

Yes, well we have a second level course and it's been my observation that often that is where things really take hold as far as understanding what we're trying to get at in AVP. As you know, our central concept is transforming power and I think if in a basic workshop I just get guys to recognize there is a concept which we call transforming power even though I think they may have quite a mistaken view of what it is, that I've achieved something and then if in the second level I can get them to really recognize that ah this is not something that they use as a tool but something that's available to them when they begin to develop their lives in a way which makes it possible for transforming power to come in and help them solve problems.

- RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRANSFORMING POWER AND TRAINING.

There's interesting going on within AVP circles on this subject.

SORRY I'M GOING TO STOP YOU

- IS THERE A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRANSFORMING POWER?

For me there's a definite relationship between transforming power and my belief in a supreme being, my belief that this is a force in my life that gives direction to my life and that if I conduct myself in a way that leaves me open to receiving this power, it will be there. I can shut it off though by behaving in

ways, I mean getting involved in drugs and alcohol is a very obvious example I think of how I can shut myself off from being open to transforming power.

IT'S INTERESTING THAT GETTING INVOLVED IN A HEAVY ADDICTION PROGRAM SEEMS TO BE TOTALLY RELATED TO LACK OF

Now we have in AVP people of all various persuasions. We have humanists and atheists, Buddhists and Christians and Islam. I think this is to me one of the marvels of the program because we don't seek to promote any particular religious or any particular faith. We try to leave it open to the individual to be inspired, if you might say, to follow whatever route seems to meet their particular needs. So what transforming power is to me could be quite different to somebody else, for example, who doesn't have a belief in a Supreme Being although of course I believe that -

(end tape 63)

(start tape 64)

- believing as I do that there is a Supreme Being naturally I believe this power is available to everyone whether or not they themselves have a belief in it and that it is something that directs all of our lives.

ALL THE TIME.

All the time.

IT'S INTERESTING TO WATCH OVER THE COURSE OF THE WEEKEND THE DIFFERENT REACTIONS TO THAT - HOW CUT OFF FOR MANY MANY REASONS THE PEOPLE IN THE WORKSHOP ARE WHEN THEY COME IN AND HOW OPEN THEY ARE TO AT LEAST THE POSSIBILITY BY THE END. NOT SO MUCH INTELLECTUALLY ALTHOUGH THERE WAS AT LEAST ONE VERY INTELLECTUAL PERSON BUT EMOTIONALLY THAT IS THE CARING ENVIRONMENT AS YOU POINT OUT. BUT IT'S ALSO - THIS IS WHAT I WANTED TO GET YOU TO TALK ABOUT. THE EXERCISES

SEEM TO BE VERY INSPIRED IN THE EVOLUTION OF WHERE PEOPLE BEGIN AND WHERE THEY END UP. THERE'S REALLY A WONDERFUL DEVELOPMENT. COULD YOU -

Well the program in AVP is drawn from many sources. These individuals that I spoke about in the first workshop came from many different backgrounds in non-violence and so we've just drawn on this great wealth of information that does exist and tried to put into AVP the ones that seem to fit. Of course we are into experiential learning so this has defined to a degree the kind of material that we will use. And by experiential -

SORRY

(BACKGROUND TALK)

THE QUESTION WAS THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE EXERCISES.

Okay. Well we've drawn our material from a wide - really wide range of sources, to go back to that very first workshop, and these individuals came from many different backgrounds as far as non-violence is concerned. So that we have put together something that is not unique to us but has been used by others and tested by others. But I think we put it together in a format which has particular relevance to the kind of results that we get, recognizing that you first have to start with the individual, where he or she may be, and get them thinking positively about themselves and then ah as they can begin to improve their feelings of self they're able to move on and to ah begin the process of learning better communication, learning cooperation skills, learning trust, and finally are in a position to really take on the aspect of different ways of solving conflict and doing it in a non-violent rather than in a violent way. And so there's a definite building block process there which culminates in the role plays and then finally in the kinds of exercises we do at the end which are sort of self-inventory - the empathy exercise. This is a problem I have, how I deal with it, who am I. This is what makes me the person I am and how important are these various

aspects of myself and hopefully then leaves them at the end of the workshop with a new appreciation of self. Perhaps with some new goals for how they want to change themselves, so forth.

IS IT APPROPRIATE TO TALK ABOUT INDIVIDUALS IN THIS PAST WORKSHOP?

Ah without names I would say ah - I mean I won't mention names. Since you won't be on camera if you want to mention the name I'll be glad to ah -

NO, WE'D HAVE TO TALK WITHOUT MENTIONING NAMES. I'D WANT TO TALK ABOUT SOME OF THE PEOPLE IN IT WHO IT THOUGHT CAME THE LONGEST AND TO KIND OF SINGLE THEM OUT.

I guess I'm uneasy having my analysis of them come through in a video.

THAT'S WHY I PHRASED THE QUESTION IS IT APPROPRIATE. WHAT I WANT TO SAY IS YOU CAN TRUST ME. I WOULD DO IT IN A WAY THAT I DON'T THINK WOULD COMPROMISE YOU OR MAKE THEM IN ANY WAY FEEL BAD.

I don't think I'd want for instance to come through that I immediately perceive Mighty Mouse as a very shy person with a extremely low self-esteem.

NO OKAY.

I would be willing to say that there was one member of the group who wanted to give himself an adjective name and when he then got into a role play was able to give himself a negative adjective name and that these things are signs to us that help us to see what kind of help various individuals in the group are going to need. Also we take note, if individuals are leaving the group as you know one individual did and I left with him. Because often they leave because they need support and they - the feelings are just too powerful for them to deal with at that particular moment.

LET'S MOVE INTO ANOTHER AREA BECAUSE I CAN SEE THERE WOULD BE PROBLEMS GETTING INTO SPECIFIC PERSONALITIES. THAT IT COULD BE PROBLEMATIC FOR YOU. ONE OF THE THINGS I THINK IS VERY IMPORTANT TO DO IN THIS PIECE IS NOT JUST GIVE AN OVERALL SENSE OF WHAT NON-VIOLENCE IS EXPERIENTIALLY BUT TO ALSO I THINK CLEAR UP SOME MISCONCEPTIONS. COULD YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT PEOPLE PERCEIVE NON-VIOLENCE TO BE?

WELL I think the stereotype is the individual who just lets other people walk over him or her, okay. And this is certainly not we're talking - not what we're talking about in AVP when we talk about non-violence because we believe people should stand their ground. If they have something they believe in it's very important that they make this known and stand by it. This does mean that sometimes individuals have to suffer. I was impressed by this situation of a man in prison who became one of our facilitators and he was in a group with some other men in the yard. Something happened that wasn't supposed to happen and the guards came up and wanted to lay the blame on someone. So they started asking him and in prison you don't snitch and he wasn't going to say who did it. And so they decided he was the one that they were going to penalize. So they took him off and disciplined him which involved physically beating him up and then threw him in solitary. Later the sergeant who had been in charge of this operation came back to him and said to him, why did you look at me the way you did when we were disciplining you? And he said, I was looking for that if God were in you. The guard at that point had no response. He just had to leave. A few moments later he came back, apologized, put the guy back in population. Well here's somebody - I mean he was suffering for his belief because he wasn't going to curse the officers or whatever. Of course if you're a prisoner you can't very well fight back. You sort of have to take what's coming to you but he certainly could have, you know, looked at them with hatred but he didn't. He looked at them in love. And they perceive this. So I mean to live a non-violent life style doesn't necessarily mean you don't sometimes suffer. I mean look at the civil rights movement

and what people went through in the USA. So I think it really does mean, for me it means living your life in a spirit of love. And as I said earlier, not only feeling real caring for yourself but caring for the other person. And if you're going to really care about yourself, you're going to really care about your principles and you're not going to just let other people push you around. That's not being non-violent, it's just being a pushover. But if you live in that spirit there are so many things you can do that will help to resolve a conflict that are just never open to you once you decide to go the violent route. Although there's always a time to change. These guys - I was in a prison situation where the guys had decided to have a non-violent protest of some prison decision and the whole block - I mean this was the whole group made sort of a pact, you know. And so they ah they just sat in their cells, refused to go out, even refused to go out for recreation. Well the prison began to clamp down on them and then some of the guys began to deviate from the non-violence and they were throwing food, they were cursing guards, this kind of thing So it escalated into a really riotous situation. This continued for weeks. And then some of the decided we were wrong. We didn't really stay with non-violence and so as a group they agreed to cease that behaviour and return and apologize for what had happened and, but stay by their principle. And they got to talk with the warden and they got the thing ironed out.

.... I WANT TO GO INTO - I WANT TO EXTEND IT A LITTLE BIT WIDER. WOULD YOU DESCRIBE WHAT SOCIETY HAS ALLOWED

Terribly violent. I - well I say atrocious. I think it's atrocious but I'm talking USA and I'm not that familiar with the Canadian TV but I think it's atrocious what fare we have on our TV screens. And I think it certainly contributes to the level of violence in our society. We know that audio visuals - that one of the best teaching tools available and that's what we're constantly putting in front of our public is - and this includes the sitcoms which I mean may not include physical violence but have all of this other violence of not - of not being loyal, of disloyalty, and of deception and this kind of thing which ah I think is very

negative. I don't myself believe in censorship. But I wish we could come to a more sane approach to what we put before the public.

IS WHAT'S BEING PUT BEFORE THE PUBLIC DOES IT CREATE VIOLENCE OR JUST - MY SUSPICION IS THAT IT'S OUT THERE BECAUSE PEOPLE WILL WATCH IT AND SO MY SUSPICION, IT'S MORE THAN A SUSPICION, MY CONFIRMED VIEW IS THAT IT'S A REFLECTION -

- of people's values.

- OF THAT ALMOST UNIVERSAL STREAK OF VIOLENCE THAT RUNS WITHIN US.

I certainly think that that is true. I certainly think that it's true that what we see on TV is a reflection of the streak of violence in the human but we do know that there are cultures who have - which have been built on a non-violent approach to problem solving rather than a violent approach and so that can be built into the culture. And certainly among the nations of the world I think they're certainly nations that are much more focused on solving problems with neighbours diplomatically rather than through the war system. And obviously we've come to a point in societal development now where we either have to change that approach or we destroy ourselves. And I guess in that way you can say thermonuclear warfare is a blessing if it really brings us to the realization that we have to learn to get along and work out our problems together rather than blowing ourselves up. And personally I believe that's going to happen. I think the human being is enough of a rational being that we aren't going to go over that precipice, not to say that we may not have some rather horrendous incidents on the way. We've already had some - Nagasaki and Hiroshima - Hiroshima. And I hope those aren't repeated but that is no assurance that something like that might not happen again. But I think that would just reinforce that we can't go this route. There has to be another way and there is another way. I have great regrets about some of the things my own country has done such as the Law of the Seas treaty which

was negotiated over many years through quite a few administrations in our country and then a president came in who didn't want to go along with it. This was I think one of the marvels of diplomatic activity. And I think still forms the basis for achieving some of the results on a macro international scale which we want to see happen and I think eventually it will. But as I - I view this whole matter of non-violence in a - not only look at the macro scale but the micro scale and for me the micro scale is the one on one and which is why I'm in AVP. Because I really feel that I'm contributing something to helping individuals learn to deal with their personal problems in a non-violent way rather than a violent way.

LAST QUESTION.

(end tape 64)

(start tape 65)

HOW WOULD YOU STATE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
QUAKERISM AND NON-VIOLENCE? NOT FACTUALLY - NOT
HISTORIC.

Well I guess I would have to start with historical -

(laughter)

LET ME REPHRASE THE QUESTION. WHAT IS IT ABOUT
QUAKERISM THAT MAKES QUAKERS LOOK FOR NON-VIOLENT
SOLUTIONS.

In Quakerism we believe there is that of God in every person. And so if every person is indeed a part of the divine then to approach another person in a manner that is disrespectful of that is being disrespectful of God. And therefore we believe that since each individual has this divine aspect and can - if she or she wants to reach to that just within him or herself, you know, I mean it's not something you have to depend upon anybody else to help us do that if we will stay in touch with that power within ourselves we can indeed help reflect the divine aspect of

ourselves in our daily lives. And you will note when I start an AVP workshop I say to the group, we believe that there's good in everybody. If you take one `O' out of the `good' you've got what I really mean. (chuckles)

THAT'S LOVELY. THANK YOU.

Okay.